



## Keeping neighbors in the know

Welcome to the first issue of **The High Bridge Progress. The Progress** is mailed to residents of Farmville, Nottoway, Cumberland and Prince Edward counties who live near or have interest in the new High Bridge State Park being developed. We plan to use this newsletter to keep you informed and maybe even get you involved in the development of this new 34-mile linear state park. In fact, this issue includes information on an Aug. 17 meeting where you can provide your thoughts on this project.

Hopefully, most of you had heard that this linear or “rails-to-trails” state park was coming. The concept began to take shape when Norfolk Southern Corporation announced plans to abandon their railroad corridor between Pamplin and Burkeville. The line was abandoned in 2005.

Citing the success of other state rail-to-trail efforts in providing recreational opportunities for local residents and tourism development opportunities for the communities, Norfolk Southern offered the corridor to the Commonwealth to be used as a state park. With the support of the local county and municipal governments, the Virginia General Assembly authorized the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation to accept the donation of the corridor during the 2005 session. The donation should be completed later this year.

As managers of the Virginia State Parks system, DCR already administers two rail-trails, the 57-mile long New River Trail State Park in Carroll, Grayson, Wythe, and Pulaski counties, and the

Wilderness Road Trail in Lee County. The lessons we have learned in planning, designing, and managing those trails will be used with the High Bridge State Park.

When a new state park comes to an area, local residents have lots of questions. This is particularly true for a linear park that winds its way through several counties and has hundreds of neighbors. We will try to answer a few of the most frequently asked questions.

**When will the park open?** The abandoned right-of-way will officially become a state park once the donation is completed, but it will not immediately open to the public. As we will discuss later, the state has money to secure the property and create a development plan. However, at this time we do not have the funding or staff to develop, open and manage High Bridge State Park. It will be some time, perhaps a matter of years, before the park is ready to open.

**What happens in the meantime?** Once the donation from Norfolk Southern is complete, state park staff will secure the rail corridor with gates and signs to prevent unauthorized uses. Staff from Holliday Lake, Twin Lakes, and Sailor’s Creek state parks will oversee park construction and manage the corridor until a full time staff is assigned to the park. Once operational, state park managers and senior law enforcement staff will live in the park and will be available ‘24-7’ to provide security and respond to incidents. Existing rail-trail state parks are for

non-motorized uses such as hiking, jogging, bicycling, and horseback riding. Motorized uses are not permitted.

**What types of facilities might be included?** Decisions on the specific facilities to be included and the placement of those facilities will be made through the development of a state park master plan. However, we can discuss the types of facilities traditionally found in rail-trail parks. Trailhead parking areas will be developed at reasonable intervals. Trailheads will include rest rooms, picnic tables, parking, interpretive displays, and an informational kiosk with map, brochures and rules for use of the park. Telling the stories of the important historical events and people of the region will be the major interpretive focus for the park, so interpretive displays will be provided at important points along the corridor. Picnic areas and rest stops will also probably be placed at suitable locations.

**What is a state park master plan?** By law, funds cannot be appropriated for development of a state park without a master plan in place. This plan guides the development of that park. Virginia law also establishes the master planning process. The DCR Director has appointed a master plan advisory committee. This committee comprised of local citizens, elected officials, local government officials, local businesses, adjacent landowners, educators, historians, and other specialists provides state park planners with guidance to help shape the master plan.

The public is invited to provide input into the planning process at two public input meetings. The first of these will be to listen to the public's ideas for developing the park and the second will be to present the draft plan that is based on the public's input. The public can also provide input by telephone, e-mail, or by mail at any time. The final draft plan is presented to the DCR Board as well as to the members of the General Assembly for their approval. Once all approvals have been obtained, the plan becomes final and construction of the park can begin.

**Where are we now?** The 32-member High Bridge State Park Master Plan Advisory Committee has completed a tour of the former rail bed and has conducted an assessment of the cultural, historic, and natural assets of the corridor. The committee has identified potential use areas, potential park activities, and opportunities for the private sector. In the next meeting we will discuss the park's purpose and the types of activities and facilities the park should offer. These will be presented in the form of goals and objectives when the first public input meeting is held.

**Have the public meetings been scheduled?** The first one has. The public will be given an opportunity to provide input into the master planning process August 17, 2006 at 7 p.m. in the 3rd floor Board Room of the Prince Edward County Courthouse located on Main Street in Farmville. We invite you to tell us how you think your new state park should be developed.

**Who to contact?** The master plan is being coordinated by DCR staff. If you have questions, concerns, or ideas about the park and how it should be developed you can e-mail, telephone or mail them to the attention of Bob Munson at the address at the end of the newsletter. This information will be shared with the advisory committee. Also, please notify him if your mailing address needs correcting or you do not wish to receive future mailings.

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In future issues of the High Bridge Progress, we will keep you posted on the work of the advisory committee, shed some light on how the trail can help highlight other attractions and events in the community and perhaps dispel some myths about rail-trails and how they are used.